

Schools of Wrestling

By E.J. Harrison

From Wrestling: Catch-as-Catch-Can, Cumberland & Westmorland, & All-in Styles, published under the auspices of W. (Billy) Wood, London, W. Foulsham and Co. Ltd., 1928.

For more of Harrison's thoughts on wrestling and related topics, see his "Resumé of My Chequered Career" and his correspondence with Robert W. Smith.

It would be an arduous and perhaps almost impossible task to enumerate all the forms of the art of wrestling that from time immemorial have gradually grown up in different parts of the world, and I do not therefore propose to embark upon any such hopeless undertaking in these pages. There can be indeed very few countries whose active menfolk have not for centuries indulged in some form of wrestling, and doubtless if all such forms could be closely scrutinized, they would be found to bear a family resemblance to each other. Naturally in the earlier stages of the art, wherever practised, a match would tend to be far more a test of brute strength than of skill and finesse, and victory as a rule would declare itself on the side of the heavier and more powerful adversary. Then gradually as communities progressed in intellectual and material well-being, but not to the point of decadence, specialization manifested itself in sport and athletics as in most other human activities, and the part played by superior skill as the decisive factor in, inter alia, wrestling matches, became steadily more marked.

None the less, it is surely a noteworthy fact that there is still only one school of wrestling, if it may be so styled, in which the factor of weight, for example, is wholly ignored when contests are being arranged, and in which the weights may be indiscriminately mixed in pitting one opponent against another. I refer, of course, to the Japanese art of Ju-jitsu or Judo, in which a lightweight frequently defeats a far heavier adversary through superior skill. Although it would be entirely unjust to say or imply that skill is not an all-important factor in every branch of wrestling, and that certain variations of weight are not permissible in professional wrestling contests, I do not think it can be successfully contended that the degree in which such discrepancies are seen in Ju-jitsu matches has so far been reached in any other branch of wrestling. Alike, therefore, in the Cumberland and Westmorland, Graeco-Roman, Catch-as-Catch-Can, All-in, or even the Japanese sumo styles of the art, lightweights do not usually contend against heavyweights. There is thus a tacit admission that, other things equal, the heavier and stronger man enjoys an advantage over the lighter and weaker one.

The foregoing paragraphs already enumerate the better-known styles of the art, viz. Catch-as-Catch-Can or the Lancashire school; Cumberland and Westmorland; French or Graeco-Roman (although it may be doubted whether a reincarnated gladiator of the age of Nero would be able to discover in the repertoire of the last-named many of the "chips" or trips with which he had been familiar); All-in; Japanese sumo and Ju-jitsu. Seeing, however, that to the art of Ju-jitsu a separate volume of this useful series has already been devoted, I shall do no more than make incidental mention of it in these pages, when reference to it may help to illustrate or supplement descriptions of other schools.

A few words may perhaps be devoted to the Japanese sumo style practiced by the professional heavyweight wrestlers, veritable mountains of fat and muscle, weighing anything up to twenty stone and over [280 lb., 126 kg.] In this style of wrestling you may defeat your opponent merely by pushing or carrying him out of the ring, for which reason weight and abdominal development are deemed important. On the other hand, the style also comprises as many as forty-eight different throws, some of them similar to our own Cumberland and Westmorland, although freedom of arm grip is permitted. If one of the contestants touches the ground with his knee he is declared the loser of that bout. In spite of their huge bulk, these men are amazingly active and supple. They can easily do the "split," and raise their tremendous thighs almost to the level of their shoulders. Many years ago, at the picturesque Japanese mountain resort of Miyanoshita, I was an amused spectator of an incident in which Taiho, then a sumo champion, and a giant some six feet six or seven in height, and over twenty stone in weight, allowed an enterprising young American to take a running kick at his stomach, when with a mighty heave Taiho caused his assailant to rebound and shoot through the air on his back! The sumo system of training includes the hardening of their naturally powerful limbs by much bating and by butting at wooden posts with their shoulders. Their diet is also stronger than that of the ordinary Japanese, and they eat enormous quantities.

In weighing the relative and respective merits of these several schools or styles of wrestling, in order to make a choice in favour of one particular school or style against another, I imagine that the tyro will naturally take into consideration not only the factor of health but also of utility. What style offers the maximum advantages when viewed from these standpoints? There are not wanting, of course, authorities that extol the first-down-to-lose principle above all others, and who decry both the Graeco-Roman and Catch-as-Catch-Can styles, not to mention the All-in, because they include "ground-work" as a highly important branch of their repertoires. I should not be writing this book if I shared those opinions. Admitting that virtually all styles of wrestling save Ju-jitsu are governed by rules and conventions that detract from their efficacy as methods of offence and attack, I am satisfied from practical experience and observation that Catch-as-Catch-Can, for instance, offers considerably greater scope for use in a real rough and tumble, comprising as it does both ground-work and falls from the standing position, than the Cumberland and Westmorland school, which restricts the contestants to one method of holding, and therefore inevitably narrows the field of action and the repertoire of tricks. Regarded, too, even as exercises for physical development, there is more to be said for Catch-as-Catch-Can, with its wonderful action on the neck muscles, than for Cumberland and

Westmorland, which makes relatively less demand upon that area of the body. Incidentally the stronger neck of the Catch-as-Catch-Can wrestler would serve him in better stead in a real rough and tumble, when not infrequently the real trouble begins to brew as soon as the parties are on the ground! In such cases, it is "All-in" with a vengeance, and one's knowledge of, and ability to apply an effective stranglehold might easily make all the difference between victory and defeat. And whereas in a Catch-as-Catch-Can, or Graeco-Roman match the contestant whose two shoulder are first pinned to the mat is declared the loser, in a real struggle for mastery recourse to far more drastic methods would be necessary to gain a decision over one's opponent! I do not deny that the student of wrestling can learn something useful from almost every style extant, and that the spirit of eclecticism is to be encouraged in this as in every other form of sport; but it will surely be obvious that for practical purposes a system, such as Cumberland and Westmorland, which restricts the arms virtually to one position, and in which, if either party breaks hold, i.e., loses his grip, even though he may still be on his feet, he is declared the loser, cannot successfully challenge comparison with Catch-as-Catch-Can, not to mention Ju-jitsu, in which the most effective use is made of arms and hands as an auxiliary to one's legs, in upsetting the other fellow's equilibrium or in forcing his shoulders to the mat.

Before beginning the most difficult portion of my task, i.e. the attempt to describe in a highly condensed form the more effective and useful "chips" of the several systems enumerated, I shall offer a few general remarks on the subject of training for the fray, whether as amateur or professional.

There is, of course, nothing to beat wrestling itself as a means of training for the preservation and development of strength and agility indispensable to success on the mat. Whatever the style chosen, it will most effectively influence all the muscular groups, impart flexibility to the body and, above all, give the heart and lungs the necessary powers of endurance. In addition to training on the mat itself, however, the student can usefully practise some other auxiliary forms of exercise designed to expand and develop the muscular groups most frequently called into action by his art. In the case of Catch-as-Catch-Can, in which we are more particularly interested, the student cannot hope to make much headway without possession of a strong neck and strong hands. Without a strong neck, he will not be able to make proper use of the so-called "bridge," i.e. the position in which the wrestler raises his shoulders off the ground by arching his back, with the crown of his head and the soles of the feet as sole support at the other end, in order to avert defeat at critical moments; while without powerful hands and wrists, he will find himself severely handicapped in ground-work, more especially when trying to apply the various nelson holds. For both these branches of muscular development ordinary dumb-bells and bar-bells may be used to advantage. When practising the bridge, for example, the student should hold out the bar-bell at arm's length behind his head; then raise and lower it slowly at regular intervals, endeavouring at the same time to arch the back to the utmost extent. A really supple young wrestler can thus bend back so far as to almost touch the mat with his nose and mouth! Another favourite method among Russian Graeco-Roman wrestlers of my acquaintance, when I myself practiced that art at the then Petrograd "Sanitas" Club

during the war [World War I], was to get a comrade to sit astride one's chest as one formed the bridge, and then to lower and raise the torso with this super-imposed weight, without, however, allowing the shoulders to touch the mat. Many of these young bloods had in this way attained a degree of suppleness which placed them almost in the contortionist class; they could indeed bend and arch the back to such an extent that head and heels almost met, and from that position they could easily rise to their feet again.

For development of strength of wrist, a quite simple but none the less effective expedient is as follows: Take an ordinary table napkin or small towel and twist it between the hands. When you have twisted it apparently so far that further twisting would seem impossible, continue none the less to twist it with the maximum exertion of strength. A second exercise recommended by a well-known German Graeco-Roman wrestler, whose name I cannot at the moment recall, is the following: To a cylindrical rod is attached a cord about three feet in length at the end of which is a cord about 3 feet [1m] in length at the end of which is a weight of about twenty-five pounds [11 kg] avoirdupois; holding the rod at approximately the height of the lower part of the chest-bone, you should try to wind the weight round the rod by swinging it steadily.

Opinions appear to differ on the advisability of weight-lifting as a branch of training for the mat; on the whole, it may be fair to say that if not overdone, and when practised intelligently, under expert direction, weight-lifting can be beneficial, and need not be detrimental to speed.

For the wrestler in training, running and walking in the open air should never be omitted. Their salutary effect on the entire organism, and especially the lungs, cannot be overrated.

For any wrestler or athlete desirous of keeping fit, the efficacy and tonic properties of cold water cannot be too highly extolled. I am not an advocate of the cold bath, into which one must step feet first; instead I should advise the regular matutinal [early morning] cold shower in an empty bath over the bottom of which a jug of hot water has been poured to lessen the shock to the lower limbs, more particularly on chilly winter mornings. Needless to say, after working on the mat, a hot and cold douche should never be omitted. Once this wholesome and invigorating habit has been contracted, it will rarely be abandoned for the rest of one's life. Swimming is another useful aid to training, but should not be overdone. I recall that many Japanese Ju-jitsu teachers of my day did not recommend swimming as a concurrent form of sport; the idea seemed to be that too frequent immersion of the entire body in water for prolonged periods tended to soften its texture and unfit it for the more exacting and strenuous task of maintaining one's equilibrium in a totally different element. Massage after wrestling is, of course, highly beneficial and agreeable. Care should always be taken that all premises in which training is carried on are adequately ventilated and equipped with the bathing facilities described.